DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 417 CS 217 468

AUTHOR Sauer, Christine

TITLE Building Self Esteem in the Language Arts Classroom: The Cybergrrl Approach.

PUB DATE 2000-11-00

NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (90th, Milwaukee, WI, November 16-21, 2000).

PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Classroom Environment; Educational Objectives; *English Instruction; Females; Feminism; *Gender Issues; Instructional Effectiveness; Junior High Schools; *Language Arts; *Self Esteem; Student Empowerment; Student Needs; *World Wide Web

IDENTIFIERS *Web Pages

ABSTRACT

Why are girls, especially junior high school girls, continuing to learn in the shadows of their male counterparts, despite many teachers' continued attempts to treat both sexes as equal? Although one educator encouraged female participation in her classroom, she noticed two problems in particular that seemed to hinder the educational progress of junior high girls: lack of voice in the classroom and lack of technological skills. Her project proposes using "cybergrrl" Web pages (Web pages produced by a particular group of online feminists) to counteract these two problems and remove the mask of silence junior high school often places on adolescent girls. This paper first provides a rationale for the project and describes the cybergrrl Web pages. The paper then discusses the implementation framework of a cybergrrl classroom and outlines what objectives should be achieved in such a classroom. It discusses how to achieve gender equity using cybergrrls and gives the pedagogical implications for the project. Contains a 39-item "working bibliography." (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 450 417

Building Self Esteem in the Language Arts Classroom: The Cybergrrl Approach.

by Christine Sauer

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Sauer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 217 468

Building Self Esteem in the Language Arts Classroom: The Cybergrrl Approach

Christine Sauer

I. The Focus of the Project:

Recently, *English Journal* published an article entitled "Censoring Girls' Choices: Continued Gender Bias in English/Language Arts Classrooms." In this February 1998 article, Beth Benjamin and Linda Irwin-DeVitis provide a frightening look at the gender bias that continues to pervade our English classrooms. During early adolescence, according to the authors, "the transition from girl to woman is a treacherous one in which many girls begin to doubt their own feelings, and move toward relationships based on cultural stereotypes rather than honesty and truth" (67). Unfortunately, I have observed firsthand this lack of self confidence by junior high girls. During the three years I taught eighth grade, I was constantly encouraging my female students to speak out in class and reprimanding male students for interrupting the few girls that did participate. And often sadly, once a female student was interrupted, she seldom raised her hand to speak again.

Why are girls, especially junior high girls, continuing to learn in the shadows of their male counterparts despite our continued attempts to treat both sexes as equal? Though I encouraged female participation in my classroom, I noticed two problems in particular that seemed to hinder the educational progress of junior high girls: lack of voice in the classroom (focusing in this dissertation on the English classroom) and lack of technological skills. My project proposes using cybergrrl web pages (web pages produced by a particular group of online feminists) to counteract

these two problems and remove the mask of silence junior high often places on adolescent girls.

II. The Two Main Problems (Rationale for the Project)

Problem One: Lack of Voice in the English Classroom:

According to Dianne Horgan, author of *Achieving Gender Equity: Strategies for the Classroom*, the picture for junior high girls continues to be bleak. She claims, "Teachers interact with boys more, ask them more challenging questions, give them more precise feedback, and listen to them more" (6). No wonder girls are struggling! In another *English Journal* article, Linda Miller Cleary explores this lack of self-assurance girls feel towards writing. In "'I Think I Know What My Teachers Want Now': Gender and Writing Motivation," she notes, "young women in my study generally seemed to approach writing (and perhaps many other facets of their lives) with less confidence, with fewer findings of autonomy and self-determination" (53). Perhaps this lack of confidence in the writing of female adolescents is due to lack of teacher attention and confidence in girls' abilities. Myra and David Sadker point out in *Failing at Fairness: How our Schools Cheat Girls* that "when female students are offered the leftovers of teacher time and attention, morsels of amorphous feedback, they achieve less" (13). After repeatedly receiving a "second-best" education by their teachers, how can we expect girls to achieve the same skills as their male counterparts? It should not surprise anyone that as a group, "males come to writing with a greater sense of their own competence" (53).

Intrigued by the silence of girls in the classroom as well as the behavior of their teachers, Margaret Finders details her observations of a yearlong study in *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High*. Perhaps motivated by the ever-

present notion that girls are less outspoken in the junior high classroom than boys, or the notion that girls are more cooperative and polite, Finders conducted a study of the literacy actions of five girls over the course of a school year to examine how these girls used reading and writing. What she found by studying two separate groups ("social queens" and "tough cookies") was that school-sanctioned literacies were only tasks to be endured, but non-school sanctioned literacies such as writing notes, reading teen magazines (zines), and signing yearbooks were where any literacy that had any significant meaning took place. In fact, Finders notes that though these activities seem "playful" and unimportant, "embedded within plays, the social queens used literacies for the following purposes: establishing a set of agreed-upon norms, competing for social status, connecting within a community, and staking a claim, and defying authority" (54). Apparently these actions served as means to gain power within a social framework, a "declaration of independence" from authority figures.

Contrary to the findings of the previously mentioned studies, the girls in the Finders study were not as cooperative and complacent as they appeared to their teachers or to their male classmates in the classroom. Though most of the girls completed homework assignments regularly, most demonstrated only minimal effort for these tasks, perhaps another explanation of why girls show less educational progress than boys. In fact, "caring about learning was considered a sign of weakness, a mark of being a little girl who still needed to align herself with significant others," according to Finders (78). The tough cookies were scorned by the social queens for appearing to care about class assignments and not about social matters. Yet, the tough cookies often subverted classroom authority as well by refusing to

follow directions for class assignments. Both groups "wrote in resistance to authoritative discourse as they wrote their way into adulthood" (80).

Yet, while Margaret Finders does provide an in-depth view of the subversive literacies of junior high girls, she offers few suggestions on how to solve the recurring gender-equity problems of junior high. True, hidden literacies can be celebrated as a way for junior high girls to make meaning of their lives, but they also indicate an active subculture that remains hidden, possibly due to feelings of inferiority, from their male counterparts. Perhaps these girls were already beginning to "memorize on their bodies the feel and conviction of never being good enough," which Mark Johnson, author of *The Body in the Mind*, claims is part of American culture for women (14). The girls studied would rather pass secret notes to each other rather than voice their opinions in the classroom for fear of being scorned by male classmates.

In addition, Finders notes that in both school sanctioned and hidden literate practices, "texts were rejected or embraced, but there appeared to be no sense of answering back, no critical doubt, no disruption, no tension" (127). The girls accepted facts from zines (and textbooks for that matter) unquestioningly as a means to determine their roles in an adolescent world. Unfortunately, the glossy magazines only serve to reinforce gender relations, as sexy models and question and answer columns regarding "acceptable" behavior for young women are the norms in these magazines. While the hidden literacies of adolescent girls do indicate that girls are not entirely passive, they also indicate that due to an unfriendly classroom environment, they have a need to guard their opinions as secret.

Problem Two: Lack of Technological Skills

Perhaps even more alarming than the silence of girls in the junior high English classroom is their continued resistance to technology. Despite meager technological progress by junior high girls, boys "are the ones who monopolize the spaces in the school's computer room at lunch and before and after school, and they take more computer courses in high school and college" (Sadker & Sadker 123). Even though adolescent girls often make better overall grades than the boys, "despite their good grades, they are less likely to select challenging courses, particularly in math and science" (Horgan 13). By avoiding these classes which teach technological elements, girls cheat themselves of opportunities that might provide them with an education equal to that of a male student. And when females do make it into computer classrooms, the environment is often a hostile one, because "Boys are more aggressive when it comes to grabbing space at a classroom computer, and they often fail to share with girl classmates" (Sadker & Sadker 123).

Despite these problems, it might seem likely that the number of females using computers will increase each year, as female students in elementary and secondary schools are often exposed daily to technology and are thus learning how to navigate electronic culture at an earlier age than their predecessors. Right? Wrong. In fact, in a 1997 *Educational Research* study, four researchers discovered that "boys were found to use computers at home more frequently than girls" and that older girls "like computers less than the younger girls or boys" (Comber et al. 129). Despite the flaws in this study (no mention of economic backgrounds, etc.), the results did indicate that younger girls (ages 11-12) with equal exposure to technology as boys

of the same age used computers nearly as much and reported "liking computers almost as much as younger boys" (131). While the gap appears to be closing, nonetheless the youngest members of the female gender continue to be shortchanged from this career necessity. The following article outlines a proposal to make computer space a comfortable space for junior high girls to voice their opinions while learning to navigate online technology at the same time.

III. Cybergrrl Web Pages: Systems of Resistance

Over the past few years, the electronic environment of the Web has served as an underground location to proclaim feminism. Web pages by "Cybergrrls" (*grrl* meaning a girl with an attitude, *cyber* referring to electronic space) increase daily on the Internet. One of the early founders is Aliza Sherman who created the character of "Cybergrrl" on her Web page. According to Sherman, Cybergrrl "champions getting more women and girls online to make sure they aren't left behind in our increasingly technical workplace and world" (8). Unfortunately though, as Comber et al. note in the previously mentioned study, girls are being left behind as they continue to use computers far less often than boys of the same age. Perhaps girls are not interested in online technology, as the study speculates, but more likely adolescent girls, like their older counterparts, have been shut out of the androcentric culture of computer technology due to their gender.

Nonetheless, as Nina Wakeford notes in "Networking Women and Grrrls with Information/Communication Technology: Surfing Tales of the World Wide Web," there are women who, despite the odds, use the Web for feminist purposes or "other radical cultural projects of resistance such as the creation of grrrl space" (52).

Evidently, cyberspace, or "grrl" space, functions as a way to practice the French feminist notion of "Ecriture feminine" according to Sherman. "Ecriture feminine," as defined by feminist scholar Arleen Dallery, is feminist writing that contains multiple meanings, and "lack[s] closure and linear structure" (62). She claims that this form of writing can be used to alter the dominant discourse, and Sherman practices this form of discourse on the Web and in her Cybergrrl handbook. Sherman realizes the danger of ignoring our adolescent girls and calls for direct action, stating, "in order for women to gain and maintain a strong position in the technology and new media industries and to be the creators of the technologies, girls have to be encouraged early to get involved in math, science, and computers" (213).

Nina Wakeford echoes this sentiment noting, "it would be misleading to think that writers universally characterize women's relationships with electronic networks as successful" (52). Though Wakeford does acknowledge the various problems cybergrrls have while navigating electronic space, her essay takes a decidedly positive stance as she shows what can be done when women claim online space as feminist space. Both Wakeford and Sherman list Web sites for young girls in their works such as American Girl (http://www.americangirl.com) and Planet Girl (http://www.planetgirl.com), and these sites, according to Sherman, are online spaces "where their [cybergrrls'] personality comes across and they get the chance to express themselves" (210). These literacies are not the hidden literacies that Margaret Finders details; instead these Web pages are bold proclamations of adolescent needs and desires, ignoring the notion that seems to pervade junior high English classrooms: "Girls are supposed to be modest; boys are expected to brag and take credit for their accomplishments" (Horgan 15). Cybergrrl pages are

devoted to a variety of interests, ranging from literature to sports.

Cybergrrls clearly aren't afraid to embrace their gender or to resist the notion of women as victims online, or as victims of a male society. Most of the cybergrrls Wakeford describes instead "have created Web pages which actively confront the 'harassed female' stereotype by creating networks of explicitly women-centered or feminist projects as alternative spaces in computing culture" (53). Unlike the girls in the Finders study who discretely blot out an obscene yearbook comment by a male student with a thick black marker, cybergrrls celebrate their sexuality and femininity, refusing to feel ashamed of their gender. Perhaps unfortunately, women are associated with their bodies first as the younger members of our gender begin to learn during adolescence. Yet, as feminist scholar Susan Bordo notes, "If we do not struggle to force our work and workplaces to be informed by our histories of embodied experience, we participate in the cultural reproduction of dualism...the continuing masculiaztion of our public institutions" (42). Because the Internet may become the workplace of the future, it becomes vital for our female students to claim their online space.

Why is the creation of cybergrrl Web pages on the Web so crucial? First of all, the Web is a powerful and accessible means to publish. Poems, stories and discussions can be published almost immediately, as the Web does not experience the extreme lag time of print publications. Xander Mellish, who runs a site for short stories and cartoons, chose to publish on the Web because, "I could publish my stories the way I wanted...the stories could be read as quickly as I wrote them" (Sherman 174-175). Mellish notes an additional feature of online publishing—Web

documents aren't subject to an editor's whims, and thus a cybergrrl is free to express her opinion in this forum. Though online publications such as Web pages have not been formally accepted as "scholarly publications," perhaps because they aren't taken as seriously, these forums are becoming more popular for free expression. And, Nina Wakeford argues,

> I resist the notion that working on the Web, whether surfing or creating the pages, is always or necessarily insignificant, marginal to women's lives and to cultures of feminism. I reclaim the activity known as "surfing" as *serious* play which can create and maintain relationships, be they between individuals, organizations or hypertext documents (54).

One glance at some of these cybergrrl Web pages and it is evident that these young creators do take this forum as a vital mode of expression.

Yet, there are a few Web sites that claim to be feminist but continue to reinforce stereotypical notions of women, a contradiction that might confuse adolescent girls. For example, Carla Sinclair's NetChick Web site includes a clubhouse complete with a beauty salon. Though Sinclair does present the positive message that "grrls don't blame men for anything" but "enjoy their femininity...at the same time," this message seems contradictory when presented alongside an image of a beauty parlor (Wakeford 61). In addition, all of the studies described above fail to mention racial identities and how they relate to feminism on the Web. Though Cybergrrl is supposed to be our hero according to Sherman, are minority adolescent females going to identify with her seeing that she is Caucasian? Also, Cybergrrl is decidedly cute with flowing hair and a sexy smile, which may reinforce the image that beauty is necessary to succeed, and adolescent girls are already bombarded with

this message through paper literacies such as zines. However, online space is just beginning to be appropriated as a possible feminist space, and if junior high girls explore this technology early enough, they will have several opportunities to find a comfortable voice. According to the original Cybergrrl herself, the founding women "staked a claim on uncharted territory, not only to make a name for themselves within the online world but also to pave the way for other women who would follow" (147). The door has been opened for young women, but they must be encouraged to step inside by those already there.

IV. Implementing a Cybergrrl Classroom: The Framework

Last spring, a fellow teacher and I tested out a sample "cybergrrl" classroom, inviting seventh and eighth grade girls from the local junior high to participate in a six week project to study how girls relate to cybergrrl web pages. After showing the girls some sample cybergrrl pages, we invited the them to design their own pages, and spent the remaining weeks teaching the girls how to set up a web page using Claris HomePage, insert clip art and sounds, link to other web pages, and compose online. Our study highlighted both the benefits and potential pitfalls of implementing such a project in the language arts or computer classroom. For example, we didn't realize that many of the girls had previous computer experience and a few of the girls actually knew more than we did, subverting our roles as teachers or guides, though Roberta Furger points out in *Does Jane Compute?: Preserving Our daughter's Place in the Cyber Revolution* that this is not a problem. She writes, "Summoning up and displaying our own curiosity can be inspirational. Even if we've never logged onto the Internet, or have never installed a new software program, we can teach our

daughters valuable lessons by being unafraid to explore, and by encouraging them to explore right along with us" (40). Our lack of knowledge about a few sites on the Internet, for example, allowed the girls to be able to teach us and further gain technological confidence.

Yet a few of the girls overly relied on our help constructing the pages. Some would attempt to link two pages together, for example, and then would immediately raise their hands for help to fix the problem. Since there were only two of us and ten of them, a few began trying a few more solutions and solving many problems on their own, asking for help only when all solutions were exhausted. This reliance clearly tapered off as the girls grew more confident of their own skills and taught each other.

And the girls more than surpassed our expectations. They learned how to design web pages and compose online, in an environment safe from critical comments from male students. There seemed to be a real feeling of community and cooperation, as the girls worked together to share sites that contained interesting webpage wallpaper or graphics. Sometimes one girl would find a graphic that was unique and immediately the other girls would try downloading the graphic on their pages as well, causing many of the pages to have some of the same images. Yet though the girls often copied graphics off of each other, they implemented them in different ways for the most part, keeping the web pages individual and unique. For example, one girl might include a large graphic directly copied off of the web, while another might use a smaller copy of the graphic dramatically offered by Adobe PhotoShop. Allowing the girls to share images and websites increased the feeling of cooperation and community, and if anything, this practice caused them to use the

Internet, Claris HomePage, and Adobe Photoshop even more and practice their computer skills, because they didn't want to be left out of the community by not having a certain graphic on their pages.

Based on the results of the study, I would like to achieve the following objectives in a "cybergrrl" classroom.

Students of both sexes should:

- Design a personal web page
- Compose online in a safe space free from harassment or intimidation of other students
- Grow confident in their abilities to use technology
- Explore the Internet for clip art, sound, and text to insert into their pages
- Continue to add to their pages as skill levels increase using critical thinking skills to organize a page
- Become aware of students in other cities and countries posting web pages to gain a global perspective

In addition, Roberta Furger points out in *Does Jane Compute?:Preserving Our Daughter's Place in the Cyber Revolution* that the increasing amount of technology does not guarantee that students are learning higher level skills such as designing web pages, since the computers could be used only for word processing. The cybergrrl classroom aims to implement higher level skills in both composing online and web page design to head off this problem. Furger also points out another difficulty, noting, "We are a long way from ensuring that all our daughters and our sons share equally in the bounty of technological riches" (83). A cybergrrl classroom also aims to include girls on technological adventures by encouraging girls to use technology in an environment safe from harassment, where they feel confident sharing computers with the boys and claiming an equal amount of time to use them.

Thus, the framework for a cybergrrl classroom might be structured as follows, depending on a language arts' teacher's access to resources and time for such a project.

- *Phase I:* Spend at least a class period viewing pages by cybergrrls and pages constructed by other students as personal homepages using the Internet. A sample list of websites to visit could be passed out, but the main goal of this phase should be for students to observe what a personal web page might look like. A class discussion could follow where students share what they liked and didn't like about each webpage. Students could also view web pages from students in other countries to gain a global perspective of the web community.

- *Phase II:* Teach the basics of Adobe PhotoShop using pictures the students bring from home or their class pictures. By using this program, students can learn how to alter the images they find on the web as well as having a first resource for making their web pages personal and unique. In addition, the students will have their first graphic to insert into their webpage for the webpage construction phase and will be familiar with using the scanner if they find other pictures to alter.

- *Phase III:* Teach the basics of Claris HomePage such as inserting a background, images, and text and creating links to another page. Students can practice inserting images using their picture altered by PhotoShop.

- *Phase IV:* Allow students to explore the Internet for clip art and graphics. A teacher might suggest some sites to look at and students can share sites as well. Web pages by popular music groups and teen clothing stores were popular with the girls in the cybergrrl study. Students can also be taught how to download sounds for the pages as well.

- *Phase V:* Encourage students to insert texts that explain the page throughout their sites. Teachers could require that a few key issues be discussed on pages, for example, a student's hobbies or family background.

- *Phase VI:* Post the pages on a password protected, internal system, so that student web pages are only accessible to teachers, family members, and classmates to protect the students from Internet harassment. Students could be encouraged to view each other's pages in class and compare similarities and differences.

Obviously, the implementation of a cybergrrl classroom will be easier in classrooms with open access to technology; however, teachers could modify this framework based on the time constraints and technological access of their schools. Another web page program would work just as well, or students could learn only how to insert clip art from a classroom clip art program, for example. As long as the students create a personal, electronic space to share their thoughts, the project will have some significant pedagogical implications for the junior high language arts classroom.

V. Achieving Gender Equity Using Cybergrrls: Pedagogical Implications (How the Project is Significant)

Clearly, adolescent girls are still lagging behind their male counterparts when it comes to technology, despite the first strides made by cybergrrls. But the fact remains: online space can be a place to construct a powerful feminist literacy as Wakeford and Sherman note. As junior high girls still resort to hidden paper literacies to construct identities, while remaining less experienced with technology as Comber et al. note, a new pedagogy needs to be developed to interest junior high girls in technology. Though the hidden paper literacies can be considered a step in establishing a form of independence from adults by the social queens, "the girls actual consequences were constricted by time, movement, and talk" (Finders 129). The creation of Web pages might allow adolescent girls a less constrictive atmosphere and a place to explore their "passion" for these subversive literacies with one caveat: these subversive literacies can be implemented in the classroom as a means to encourage girls to use technology and voice their opinions at the same time. Finders laments in her study, "None of this [writing notes] was what they were supposed to be doing in school, and the passion they exhibited for these tasks was never evident in the sanctioned literate tasks" (79). Perhaps the allowing junior high girls to create Web pages in the language arts classroom as a way to respond to a text or do some creative writing could provide a new avenue for exploring the issues of adolescence. Furthermore, Dianne Horgan lists 13 strategies to "a better learning environment" in *Achieving Gender Equity*. At least five of these goals can be met using Cybergrrl Web pages as models for student Web page construction.

Goal Three: "Encourage risk taking and help students set goals" is easily achieved because students must set goals for Web page completion (Horgan 49). They must decide on the length of text and the amount of graphics they need, yet at the same time, they must also consider what kind of message they want to send to readers of their page. Horgan points out, "encouraging young girls to reach their full potential must also include helping them establish realistic goals and good decision-making skills" (21). Risk taking is a skill that adolescent girls appear to lack, despite their subversive literacies, as they conscientiously avoid more challenging courses of study. By encouraging girls to take risks by sharing their ideas on Web pages, complacent behavior is discouraged. Margaret Finders notes that the junior high teachers of her study often reward complacent behavior of adolescent girls. She asks, "What messages are sent to these young women when teachers privilege 'nice, kind, and helpful' over intellectual grappling?" (123) What messages indeed. We cannot allow young women to merely sit back and continue to let their male counterparts dominate technology, especially since the creation of Web pages can be an empowering and risk taking experience for women. Sherman claims that by building her own Web site, "I could self-publish on the Internet and make my own writing available to anyone anywhere in the world who went online. I didn't have to ask anyone's permission or follow anyone's rules. This was an exciting idea" (8). Margaret Finders has proved that the girls in her study are passionate about writing, just not school sanctioned writing, as this writing is not a safe place to express ideas openly.

Goal Six: "Avoid negative messages" can also be met by implementing cybergrrl Web pages either online or via printed out copies if technological resources

are lacking (Horgan 49). The teacher can present these Web pages, among others by various groups of interest, as examples to the class and discuss the positive and negative aspects of each site. Since cybergrrl Web pages are, on the whole, decidedly positive, these would be excellent models. A discussion of connotation and denotation could be worked in as students explore the site text via computers or printed copy, encouraging students to discuss the overall "feel" of a page.

While examining sample Web pages as a class or in smaller groups, Goal Eight: "Reduce stereotypical thinking" can also be met (49). By showing Web pages of girls and women in power alongside carefully selected pages of other groups in power, the stereotypes often shown in literature or in textbook pictures might have less effect instead of continuing to perpetuate these stereotypes. More importantly, junior high girls who lack a classroom voice, or who only resort to hidden literacies such as note passing, will find a medium to speak without fear of interruption from male classmates. Since boys and girls will be viewing Web pages by both sexes, both groups will be able to explore gender identities and perhaps find a way to make sense of the confusing time of adolescence. And as Horgan notes, "establishing a gender identity should include a chance to explore fully the whole range of feminine behavior" (158).

At the same time however, Goal Ten: Remember individual differences" can also be achieved (49). By discouraging the use of stereotypes and showing both sexes a wide variety of Web pages, students can see that there isn't a "right" Web page to aim to construct; and that the books they choose to discuss, the pictures they choose to include or the stories they tell can be their own. Also, Web site creation might benefit both girls and boys who are audio or visual learners as online

documents often include sound and graphics. In addition, the teacher's role "should be finding out as much as possible about each student as an individual" (165). Once the students view a wide variety of samples, they can begin to construct their own individual pages. If the page construction is set up by the teachers as a private activity, the girls may become less self-conscious, as "females tend to focus on whether their work is pleasing to others" (Horgan 51).

Lastly, a Web page assignment in the English classroom meets Goal 13: Focus on math and science" (49). Though Web page construction probably would take place in language arts class or a combination English/computer class, junior high girls will still gain equal technological skills to those of the boys. And Web page construction is extremely easy to use, especially if the students learn to use Claris HomePage or Microsoft FrontPage, two of the most user-friendly applications on the market. Both programs provide step by step instructions and tutorials, so by using these programs both sexes will gain experience with technology. And page construction is not the sole responsibility of the student. Teachers also have two responsibilities while trying to meet this goal. According to Horgan, teachers must "*show enthusiasm and excitement about math and science* and to convey that enthusiasm to girls" (181). By spending time out of the busy English/language arts schedule to focus on Web page text and by carefully choosing colorful, interesting pages written by teens like themselves, both boys and girls are likely to become enthused. In addition, Horgan states, "Teachers need to be alert to ways in which they can relate math and science to topics that are of special interest to girls" (179). Adolescents are almost always interested in what their peers are doing and by

linking this interest to a technical skill such as Web page creation, more girls may be interested in gaining online skills.

Also, according to Sherman, "girls need fun and interesting places to go online so they are entertained, educated, and inspired" (210). Clearly, junior high girls are interested in the activities of their peers as the contents of the notes passed often contained gossip about classmates in the Finders study. Adolescent girls could visit Web sites of classmates and other cybergrrls on the Web to establish connections and demonstrate literacy, while attempting to make sense of the world. And Web sites, like notes and yearbook signatures, might become symbols of status for girls. Finders recounts the practice of how learning a new way to fold notes became a way for one girl to gain power in the social circle. That girl took on the role of teacher and taught the fold to others in the group. While this practice might be seen as exclusive, if the same practice happened when one girl learned a new way to link text to graphics, for example, and she taught the others, a little boasting might be worth the exclusivity because the girls will encourage each other to learn new technology. Though the girls may feel a little competitive, the end result of having a greater online population of women justifies the means, especially when we as teachers are facing an adolescent female population weak in computer skills.

I am not suggesting that creating Web sites in the classroom would not have a few problems, however. Evaluation might pose a problem as some students might choose to privilege graphics and sound over text, though teachers could offer a few set guidelines for pages and use these as a basis for evaluation. And these Web sites might not become a completely free space for girls to express themselves if the girls continue to value secrecy. According to Finders, the hidden literacies of note

passing and zine reading served as an act of self-presentation, because "not only were they documenting interest in what they considered adult content, but perhaps what is more important, they were demonstrating their defiance of adult authority by breaking the perceived rules of what constituted appropriate reading materials" (57). Breaking the rules set by adults was an obvious attraction to the practice of note passing, and creating Web sites in the classroom probably won't replace these hidden literacies in the classroom, nor should they. The outcome to hope for would be that girls might feel more free to express their opinions outwardly, away from the ridicule of their male (and female) peers. These individual Web sites should not be seen as utopias for adolescent girls but also not "sites devoid of power and influence for women" as they "offer women a way into the male-dominated computer culture" as Gail Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan note in a recent article about online women, "Women on the Networks: Searching for E-Spaces of Their Own" (173).

Lastly, school may be the only place for girls to learn these technologies. In fact, Margaret Morse notes in "Virtually Female: Body and Code" that "lack of access to the technology of information society threatens to screen out vast parts of the world population behind a curtain of silicon, producing socio-economic disparities that are even more acute" (29). Girls often not only lack technological knowledge due to their gender, but due to their economic background as well. The creation of Web sites at school may be one way to help these females already at a great disadvantage behind their technically savvy male peers. In fact, the National Council of Teachers of English has become so concerned about students learning how to use technology that one of their stated goals of English education is Goal eight: "Students will use a variety of technological skills to gather and synthesize

information and to create and communicate knowledge" (NCTE 3). Implementing cybergrrl pages and having students construct a page of their own would meet this goal, because students must pull together various sources to provide a coherent page of their own creation. And as Sherman proclaims, "If we help one other woman get online, we'll build a legacy of technical savvy and connectedness to the world for our daughters and granddaughters" (213). Just as women marched for the right to vote when it was needed, it is now every teacher's responsibility to help our female students navigate electronic environments.

V. Conclusion

Our old methods of encouraging girls to take more math and science classes don't seem to be working, as the Internet based on these technologies continues to persist as a largely male-dominated electronic space. While women are joining online culture daily, our younger members still fall behind male students with regards to use and experience with technology. Yet, literacy is clearly valued by the social queens of Finders' study, as "the group used literacy to lace its members tightly together" (48). Perhaps this need for these hidden literacies can be partially met by the creation of individual Web sites in the classroom, while also meeting the glaring need for an increase in technological skills among adolescent females. However, though the girls conduct an active literate underlife, to their peers and teachers they appear complacent, accepting of the status quo, especially in respect to technology. Implementation of cybergrrl Web sites models a technological possibility for a classroom voice to this silent faction. According to the original cybergrrl, "We each have to act as role models for all girls as well as for other women, showing them that

technology isn't something to fear but something to control and utilize for their benefit" (Sherman 213). The dissertation is one possible manifestation of Aliza Sherman's call.

A Working Bibliography

Annas, Pamela J. "Style as Politics: A Feminist Approach to the Teaching of Writing." *College English* 47 (1985): 360-71.

Balsamo, Anne Marie. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women.* Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

Barbieri, Maureen. *Sounds from the Heart: Learning to Listen to Girls.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995.

Bauer, Dale. "The Other 'F' Word: The Feminist in the Classroom." *College English* 52 (1990): 385-96.

Benjamin, Beth, and Linda Irwin-DeVitis. "Censoring Girls' Choices: Continued Gender Bias in English Language Arts Classrooms." *English Journal* 87 (1998): 64-71.

Bishop, Wendy. "The Perils, Pleasures, and Process of Ethnographic Writing Research." *Taking Stock: the Writing Process Movement in the 90's.* Ed. Lad Tobin and Thomas Newkirk. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook: 1994.

Blackman, Shane J. "'Poxy Cupid!' An Ethnographic and Feminist Account of a Resistant Female Youth Culture: The New Wave Girls." *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures.* Ed. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine. London:Routledge,1998. 207-228.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body.* Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1993.

Cleary, Linda Miller. "'I Think I Know What My Teachers Want Now': Gender and Writing Motivation." *English Journal* 85 (1996): 50-57.

Comber, Chris, et al. "The Effects of Age, Gender, and Computer Experience Upon Computer Attitudes." *Educational Research* 39 (1997): 123-132.

Coyle, Karen. "How Hard Can It Be?" *Wired_Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace.* Ed. Lynn Cherry and Elizabeth Reba Weise. New York: Seal P, 1996.

Cyganowksi, Carol Klimick. "The Computer Classroom and Collaborative Learning: The Impact on Student Writers." *Computers and Community: Teaching Composition in the 21st Century.* Ed. Carolyn Handa. Portsmouth: Boynton: 1990.

Dallery, Arleen B. "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: Ecriture Feminine." *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. Ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989.

De Lauretis, Theresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

Dibbell, Julian. *A Rape in Cyberspace*. 1993. Online 10 April 1999.

Douglas, Susan. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female*. New York: New York Times Books, 1994.

Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990.

Evard, Michele. "'So Please Stop, Thank You': Girls Online." *Wired_Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*. Ed. Lynn Cherry and Elizabeth Reba Weise. New York: Seal P, 1996.

Finders, Margaret J. *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High*. Urbana: NCTE, 1997.

Flores, Mary J. "Computer Conferencing: Composing a Feminist Community of Writers." *Computers and Community: Teaching Composition in the 21st Century*. Ed. Carolyn Handa. Portsmouth: Boynton: 1990.

Flynn, Elizabeth. "Composing as a Woman." *College Composition and Communication* 39 (December 1988): 423-35.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Furger, Roberta. *Does Jane Compute?: Preserving Our Daughters' Place in the Cyber Revolution*. New York: Warner, 1998.

Gilbet, P. "Writing Pedagogy: Personal Voices, Truth-Telling and 'Real' Texts." *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy*. Ed. C. Baker and A. Luke. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1991.

Gil-Gomez, Ellen M. "The Practice of Piece-Making: Subject Positions in the Classroom." *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*. Ed. Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham. New York: MLA,1998.

Gray, Heather M., and Samantha Phillips. *Real Girl/Real World: Tools for Finding*

Your True Self. Seattle: Seal P, 1998.

Green, Karen, and Tristan Taormino, eds. *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Wrtitings from the Zine Revolution*. New York: Griffin, 1997.

Guerrilla Girls. *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Hall, Kira. "Cyberfeminsm." *Computer-Mediated Commutation: Linguistic, Social,* and *Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Ed. Susan C. Hering. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1996.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto." *CyberReader*. Ed. Victor J. Vitanza. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1996.

Harding, Sandra, ed. *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Hawisher, Gail E. and Patricia Sullivan. "Women on the Networks: Searching for E-Spaces of Their Own." *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*. Ed. Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham. New York: MLA, 1998.

Horgan, Dianne. *Achieving Gender Equity: Strategies for the Classroom*. Boston: Allyn, 1995.

Jessup, Emily. "Feminism and Computers in Composition Instruction." *Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition Studies: Questions for the 1990's*. Ed. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Urbana: NCTE, 1991.

Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Johnson-Eiola, Johndan. "Chapter One: Border Times: Writing and Being Written in Hypertext." *Nostalgic Angels: Rearticulating Hypertext Writing*. Norwood: Ablex, 1997.

Kamler, B. "Constructing Gender in the Process Writing Classroom." *Language Arts* 70 (1993): 95-103.

Leonard, Marion. "Paper Planes: Traveling the New Grrrl Geographies." *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*. Ed. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine. London:Routledge,1998. 101-120.

Lewis, Magda. "Interrupting Patriarchy: Politics, Resistance, and Transformation